



## **Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates Frequently Asked Questions**

*Last Reviewed: 5/10/23*

### **1. When and where will graduation and dropout rates be available?**

Appealable graduation and dropout rates are made available to authorized users of the Graduation and Dropout application in August to assist districts during the Graduation Rate Appeals window. In October, (updated) auditable graduation and dropout rates are made available in the GAD to assist districts and intermediate school district auditors during the Exit Status Audit window.

Final graduation and dropout rates are available for preview in the [MI School Data portal](#) in February. These rates will become public in late February after the data are delivered to the Michigan Legislature.

### **2. How is the cohort four-year graduation rate calculated?**

The cohort four-year graduation rate is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the school year 4 years prior to the selected school year (assigned to the selected school year cohort), and graduated four years later with a regular diploma. It accounts for students who transfer in and out of the district, who leave school permanently, who leave school during one school year and return in another, or who are retained in a grade but stay in school and graduate later than their original classmates. The number of "on-track graduated" students is used as the numerator and divided by the total count of all cohort status categories (on-track graduated, other completer, off-track continuing, dropout).

For example, the cohort four-year graduation rate for 2023 is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the 2019-20 school year (assigned to the 2023 cohort) within the criteria above.

### **3. How is the cohort four-year dropout rate calculated?**

There is no national standard for calculating cohort four-year dropout rates. Michigan has chosen to maintain consistency by using the guidelines provided by the National Governors Association and the United States Department of Education to calculate this rate.

The cohort four-year dropout rate is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the school year 4 years prior to the selected school year (assigned to the selected school year cohort), and left high school permanently, at any time during the four-year period, prior to completion or whose whereabouts are unknown. The number of "dropouts" is used as the numerator and is divided by the total count of all status categories (on-track graduated, other completer, off-track continuing and dropout).

For example, the 2023 cohort four-year dropout rate is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the 2019-20 school year (assigned to the 2023 cohort) within the criteria above.

**4. Why do a school's graduation and dropout rates not add up to 100 percent?**

A dropout rate is not equivalent to subtracting the graduation rate from 100 percent, because that method would count students who are "other completers" or "off-track continuing" as dropouts, which they are not. "Other completers" are students who earned a General Educational Development (GED), certificate, or reached the special education maximum age. Students in the "off-track continuing" category are those who did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school.

**5. Why do some building rates not add up to the district rates or district rates not add up to the state rates?**

Some students may be subject to one of the exceptions below. All other students are included in building, district and state graduation, and dropout rates.

- Exceptions:
  - Buildings that solely serve neglected and/or delinquent children and youth (as defined by Title I, Part D) will receive a building rate, but these students will not be included in the district's rate, nor will the building rate be subject to accountability scorecard determinations for federal accountability purposes.
  - Students attending the Michigan School for the Deaf and Blind will be counted in the state rates only.
  - Students remain in the cohort they are assigned throughout their educational career, unless they are submitted in the MSDS as participating in an approved early/middle college program. See question #14 for more information.

**6. Which students are not counted in the graduation and dropout rates (i.e., are exempt)?**

The students categorized as "exempt" are students who transferred out of the public school system (out of state, to nonpublic school or to home school) or are deceased.

Nonpublic or home school students (based on the student's residency code), who are reported by the district, are excluded from the cohort altogether as they are only receiving non-core services.

**7. Is the length of enrollment considered in calculating graduation or dropout rates?**

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, students are included in building-, district- and state-level calculations regardless of length of enrollment. This change was required by the US Department of Education pursuant to the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Prior to 2022-23, students were only included in building rates after they were reported in a building as continuing for at least two count days, based on fall and spring counts. Students were only included in district rates after they were reported in a district as continuing for at least one count day, based on fall and spring counts. State rates have never considered the length of enrollment.

**8. What if a school mistakenly reported a student in the wrong category?**

The Center for Educational Performance and Information provides an appeals window for district staff members to review and request changes to graduation and dropout information on individual students in the MSDS. From July through September, district authorized users access the MSDS to view their cohort members and can request: 1) cohort status/year changes; 2) changes to district and building Primary Education Providing Entity; and 3) linking of multiple students' Unique Identification Codes. CEPI staff members approve or deny these requests. District users can submit exit status changes for students reported in the previous school year in the SRM Collection during this appeals window.

Only an ISD auditor can submit exit status changes students last reported prior to the current school year via audit findings in the GAD Application. ISD auditors complete an exit status audit between October and December, during which they record exit status changes as audit findings that modify the cohort statuses accordingly.

**9. How do you know districts are not inflating their data to report more positive numbers?**

Each public school student in Michigan is assigned a Unique Identification Code, which is used by districts when submitting data to CEPI. Grade-to-grade progression, exit statuses, and transfers into and out of districts are tracked using the UIC. If a district were to report a student as transferred out to another district, the other district should report that student with the same UIC in its subsequent submission. If the new district does not report that UIC, the record is a missing expected record and becomes a "dropout" record for the original district.

After the appeals window in the MSDS closes, the data go through an auditing process that is completed by ISD auditors, as identified in the Michigan Department of Education pupil auditing manual.

**10. Why does the four-year on-time graduation rate only count students who graduate in four years?**

In 2008, USED adopted a common metric and created a set of regulations that added specifics on how states would define and calculate graduation rates. This policy required states to follow the progress of every student by assigning them to a cohort in the ninth grade and reporting the percentage graduating in four years. Cohort five-year and cohort six-year graduation rates are available for those students who required additional time to graduate from high school. If these students did graduate from high school with a diploma, they are considered graduates in the five-year or six-year rate.

**11. If a student drops out of high school, is every high school that student attended held responsible?**

No. Responsibility is assigned to only one school and/or district and is determined by which entity is the Primary Education Providing Entity. For more information about how PEPE is assigned, please review the "Understanding Michigan's Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates" document on the [Graduation and Dropout Information web page](#) of the CEPI website.

**12. What are the cohort five-year graduation and dropout rates?**

The cohort five-year graduation rate includes students who were categorized as "off-track continuing" at the end of four years and graduated in the fifth year with a high school diploma. The five-year graduation rate is calculated in the same manner as the four-year rate, with the addition of students who graduated in the fifth year (off-track graduated) in the numerator. "On-track graduated" and "off-track graduated" are counted as the numerator and divided by the total count of all categories (on-track graduated, off-track graduated, off-track continuing, other completer and dropout). Transfers-in and out during that fifth year are accounted for as well.

The cohort five-year dropout rate is calculated in the same manner as the four-year rate, with the addition of students who dropped out of high school in their fifth year. Transfers in and out during that fifth year are accounted for as well. Remember, the cohort five-year rates count all students in the cohort at the end of five years; these rates do not just include those students in the cohort who finished in the fifth year.

**13. What are the cohort six-year graduation and dropout rates?**

The cohort six-year graduation rate includes students who were categorized as "off-track continuing" at the end of five years and graduated in the sixth year with a regular high school diploma. The six-year graduation rate is calculated in the same manner as the five-year rate, with the addition of students who graduated in the sixth year (off-track 5+ graduated) in the numerator. "On-track graduated," "off-track graduated" and "off-track 5+ graduated" are counted as the numerator and divided by the total count of all categories (on-track graduated, off-track graduated, off-track 5+ graduated, off-track continuing, off-track 5+ continuing, other completer and dropout). Transfers in and out during that sixth year are accounted for as well.

The cohort six-year dropout rate is calculated in the same manner as the five-year rate, with the addition of students who dropped out of high school in their sixth year. Transfers in and out during that sixth year are accounted for as well. As in the five-year rates, the six-year rates count all students in the cohort at the end of six years; these rates do not just include those students in the cohort who finished in the sixth year.

**14. Why are the cohort four-year, five-year and six-year rates different?**

A building's or district's cohort graduation and dropout rates could be greater than, less than or equal to the prior year's rates for that cohort. There are two reasons for this variance: 1) changes in the numerator and 2) changes in the denominator.

1. Students who have since received their standard diploma are now included in the numerator as five-year or six-year graduates. Likewise, students who

dropped out in later years are included in the numerator for the five-year or six-year dropout rate.

2. According to the federal regulations released in 2008, states cannot freeze cohorts. Once a cohort has graduated, the cohort total (the denominator used in the graduation and dropout rates) cannot be "locked" at that total. The cohort total must remain "open" to allow accountability to be placed with the correct entity for students who attend high school beyond the fourth year.

**15. How do early/middle college students count in the cohort four-year graduation and dropout rates?**

Students submitted in the MSDS as participating in an approved early/middle college program have their cohort year increased by one. If a student is reported as no longer participating, his/her cohort year will be decreased by one.

Early/Middle college students are eligible to be considered "on-time graduates" if they complete high school with a regular diploma AND one of the following: 60 transferrable college credits, an Associate degree, credential, MEMCA certification, and/or acceptance into a registered apprenticeship. If the student takes five years to complete high school and only receives a high school diploma, he or she is considered to be "off-track graduated." Students who are reported as continuing at the end of four years and are in an approved middle college setting are considered to be "on-track continuing." After five years, the final graduation status is determined as either "off-track graduate" or "on-track graduate."

**16. Which schools/facilities do not receive graduation and dropout rates?**

- 1) An entity that does not have 12th grade students for a given cohort year, such as a 9th, 9th-10th or 9th-11th-grade building. Additionally, some schools offer grades 9-12, but do not have 12th grade students for a given cohort year. However, if graduates are reported in this entity, they will receive a graduation and dropout rate.
- 2) An entity identified as an ISD school that does not graduate students may have a dropout rate, but will not have a graduation rate. However, if an ISD graduates students, it will receive a graduation and dropout rate.

NOTE: Districts and/or schools that have fewer than the minimum required number of students required for one or more cohort year graduation rates to be reported, graduation rates will not be publicly reported. The minimum number of students, district- or school-wide and for subgroups varies by public report.

**17. Why does a middle school or elementary school building appear in the graduation and dropout report?**

If a middle school or elementary school appears in the graduation and dropout report, this entity reported a student in the ninth grade or higher, causing that student to be assigned to a cohort.

**18. My district is the fiscal agent for a court-placed school. Will students in this school impact my district's graduation rate?**

Per USED, facilities that solely serve neglected and/or delinquent children and youth (as defined by Title I, Part D) will receive a building rate, but these students

will not be included in the district's rate, nor will the building rate be subject to accountability scorecard determinations for federal accountability purposes. CEPI obtains a list of these facilities each year from MDE's Office of Field Services.

**19. How are ungraded students identified as members of a cohort?**

Students reported in educational setting "14" (special education transition) are assigned to a cohort using a computed grade (age minus 6). These students will only be placed into a cohort if they are first reported between 18 and 21 years old. Schools will be held accountable for these students. Students will not be assigned to a cohort if the first time they are reported is over the age of 21.

Students who are reported in a traditional grade, assigned to a cohort, and subsequently reported in adult education (educational setting "20") will be counted as "other high school completers" if they receive their GED certificate, or "off-track graduated" if they receive their high school diploma. While reported as active adult education students, they will be "off-track continuing." These students will not be assigned to a cohort if the first time they are reported is with an educational setting of "20."

**20. One of the schools in my district belonged to a different district last year, but is now operated by my district and kept the same five-digit school code from the previous district. How will these students be reflected in my graduation and dropout rates?**

In this situation, students who are classified as dropouts will be reflected in the previous parent district's graduation and dropout rates. All other students will be reflected in graduation and dropout rates for the new parent district (or other districts).

**Subgroup Rates**

**21. Will the graduation rates be available by subgroups?**

Yes. CEPI publishes graduation rates by subgroup, including race/ethnicity, gender, students with disabilities, migrant, economically disadvantaged, homeless and English Learners (formerly LEP). For more information on how students are placed in a subgroup, please review the "[Understanding Michigan's Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates](#)" document on the [Graduation and Dropout Information web page](#) of the CEPI website.

**22. How are students with disabilities counted in the cohort four-year graduation formula?**

Students receiving special education services are part of the cohort. Many students with disabilities, and receiving special education services, graduate with the rest of their cohort in four years with the help of support services provided by the district. If the student does not graduate in the four-year period, the student is categorized as "off-track."

**23. Why does the cohort subgroup report show cells with less than 5 percent listed as "< 5%" and those with more than 95 percent listed as "> 95%"?**

According to federal regulations released in 2008 on Information and De-Identified Records (§§ 99.3 and 99.31(b)), "States must adopt a strategy for dealing with a situation in which all students in a particular subgroup scored at the same

achievement level. One solution, referred to as 'masking' the data, is to use the notation of '> 95%' when all students in a subgroup score at the same achievement level."

**24. Why is my five-year or six-year subgroup smaller than the four-year subgroup?**

Because subgroups (except race/ethnicity and gender) are calculated on a school year basis, it is possible for a student to no longer be part of a subgroup in their fifth or sixth year. For example, the student may have been part of the English Learners (formerly LEP) subgroup for the 4-year rate, but is no longer eligible for EL services in the fifth year and hence is removed from the EL subgroup.

**Discrepancies with other agencies**

**25. It appears CEPI is using smaller cohort enrollment numbers than the National Center for Education Statistics. Why is this the case?**

Several factors contribute to a difference in the populations that make up the two numbers. The factor with the greatest impact is that the ninth-grade headcount/enrollment total is the number of ninth-graders reported to CEPI. This is what NCES is using. However, the first-time ninth-graders total reported in CEPI's Cohort Graduation Rate Reports excludes ninth-grade students who were also reported by districts as ninth-graders previously. Those who were retained in ninth-grade were excluded, as they would have been already assigned to a previous cohort the first time they were reported as a ninth-grader.

Another factor that results in a lower number of first-time ninth-graders under the cohort methodology is related to an ongoing data quality improvement process. Since the ninth-grade headcount totals were generated, the process has allowed multiple UICs for a single student to be linked. This process resulted in a lower total number of active identifiers when the cohort totals were produced.

Another factor could be the cohort assignment methodology. This methodology uses an age-to-grade conversion to place ungraded students into a cohort based on their age, whereas the headcount files used by NCES report those students in an ungraded setting. When developing the cohort method, it was determined that the state would convert records for ungraded students into "grades" based upon the age of the student. This way, every student gets assigned to an appropriate cohort.

Because of these different populations, you will rarely find an exact match between the ninth-grade headcount total and the first-time ninth-grade cohort total reported for any entity.

**26. Why are some national statistics reporting different rates for Michigan than what Michigan is reporting for itself?**

There are different calculations that may result in discrepancies between reported statistics:

- 1) These discrepancies may be the result of using a one-year incident/event rate versus a cohort four-year rate. CEPI calculates both depending on reporting needs. These two calculations are very different numbers and measure very

different things. The cohort four-year rate is calculated at the end of four years, whereas the event rate counts an event (e.g., dropouts) each year. If a student, for example, drops out of high school and returns, and then completes high school during the four-year period, this student would not be counted as a dropout at the end of four years in the cohort rate. (If he/she were to drop out again, he/she would be counted as a single dropout over the four-year period. If he/she returns and completes high school, he/she would never be counted as a dropout.) In the event rate, however, this student would be counted twice: once for each time the student dropped out.

- 2) *Diplomas Count* uses the Cumulative Promotion Index method to calculate the percent of public high school students who graduate on time with a diploma. The CPI method multiplies grade promotion ratios together to produce the graduation rate. This process does not take into account the mobility of families and the ultimate success of students who often attend other districts to complete their studies. This situation is common in large urban districts. The cohort process uses exact tracking of students to ensure better accuracy in the rates.